# Notes for Water Watchers

**Kansas Department of Health and Environment**

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## Ecological Indicators

### Ecological indicators can be used to identify potential problems

1. **Lightning bugs**: In areas where lightning bugs are abundant, their absence may indicate a toxic chemical problem.

2. **Insects around street lights**: On city street corners and around athletic fields, the continual abundance of insects around street lights may indicate a relatively "toxic chemical free" area. The sudden lack of insects around street lights may indicate there are toxic chemicals present.

3. **Insects on windshields**: When driving on highways and rural areas, insects tend to clash with windshields. The more insects collected on a during a trip, the more likely the area is relatively free from toxic chemicals.

4. **Ripening fruit**: If you place fruit in a non-refrigerated room, and the fruit does not smell as fragrant as usual, does not soften quickly, and does not attract fruit flies, it may contain significant amounts of pesticides.

5. **Jet aircraft trail**: Vapors coming from jet engines cling to dust particles in the air. The larger or more "fluffy" the trail from the plane, the dirtier the air. No matter how high a plane is flying, the air nearer to the ground is filled with more dust particles. These dust particles and attached substances can come to earth to contribute to water quality problems. This phenomena is known as atmospheric deposition.

6. **Lawn watering**: Having to water a lawn more than once a week may indicate poor soil structure and/or environmentally "unfriendly" practices.

7. **Poor lawn maintenance**: Cracks in the ground may indicate a lack of humus. which can be corrected by leaving grass clippings on the ground when you mow. Do not bag them and send them to the landfill or sweep them into the storm sewers. Composting grass clippings can be a useful tool in reducing water pollution and costs from gardening activities.

8. **Algae blooms**: High levels of blue-green algae in water bodies indicate significant water pollution originating from off-site sources (i.e. fertilizers and organic (human and animal) wastes.

For additional information, please contact KDHE, Nonpoint Source Section, at (785) 296-4195.

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